



Idaho Naturalist news

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 1

JANUARY 15, 2013

Henry's Fork Master Naturalists Certify Five Years in a Row!

The Island Park Chapter of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program began in 2008. Six members of that first class have not only certified as Master Naturalists, but have done so for five years in a row! In addition, not only did they certify, all six of these women volunteered *far beyond* the 40 hours annually to do so. Together, over the last five years, they have donated over 2,500 hours of volunteer time toward conservation in Idaho!

Congratulations to these six dedicated women! Their significant contribution to conservation in Idaho inspires us all!

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The Idaho Naturalist News is a quarterly newsletter of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program.

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Clockwise starting upper left: Nancy Willard, Bren Dismuke, Val Zupsan, Nancy Olson, Mary VanFleet, and Beth Fleming.

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Nancy Willard and **Beth Fleming** enjoy working on stewardship projects around Henry's Lake and Big Springs. They enjoy projects such as working in the native garden, monitoring recreation site usage, and many others. Beth loves all things Native American. She has quite a collection of artifacts. Her true love is garage sales; she rarely misses one in Island Park. Nancy has a love of archaeology and kayaking. Beth and Nancy spend summers volunteering and exploring in the Island Park/Yellowstone area. They both winter in the Salt Lake City area.

Bren Dismuke has a love of Harriman State Park and has designed and managed the native garden project for Harriman which is a work in progress. She has a passion for photography and can often be found in Yellowstone. She is a past president and board member of the Chapter. She lives year round in Island Park.

Val Zupsan loves all kinds of volunteering jobs. Because of her love of people, she works on many projects as part of a group, such as monitoring recreation site usage, working on the Harriman native garden, and citizen science projects. When in Nevada for the winter, she volunteers at the Smith Center for the Performing Arts as an usher. Her love of travel takes her to many foreign lands. She is the current President of the Island Park Chapter.

Nancy Olson works part time for IDFG at the Henry's Lake Hatchery. She enjoys many conservation projects, stewardship projects, and citizen science projects. She has done large mammal migration monitoring, IBA bird counts, conservation fencing projects, and many other projects. She was on the founding committee in 2008 that developed the Chapter. She is a fabulous quilter and often donates her quilts to raise money for various projects in the Island Park area. Nancy lives year round in Island Park.

Mary VanFleet initiated the founding of the first Chapter of the IMNP in 2008, and continues to work on Chapter maintenance every year. She also enjoys citizen science projects such as fish spawning, bird surveys, and mammal migration monitoring. She is currently Vice President of the Chapter. She also enjoys quilting, sewing, and is a terrific cook. She lives in Island Park in the summers and winters in Bozeman, Montana.



This is the 2008 class of the Henry's Fork Chapter of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program. The chapter is sponsored by Idaho Department of Fish and Game, The Nature Conservancy, Henry's Fork Foundation, USDA Forest Service, and Harriman State Park. Chapter members volunteer for these organizations and several others.

Do You Want to Help Study and Conserve American Kestrels?

Matt Giovanni, PhD, Director of the American Kestrel Partnership, The Peregrine Fund



The American Kestrel is North America's smallest and most colorful falcon, and rightfully maintains a reputation of a little raptor with big attitude. Most of us are accustomed to seeing kestrels hunting from power lines or fence posts, or "hover hunting" in the air. Unfortunately, researchers believe the kestrel's population status is changing from "common" to "of concern." Data from the Breeding Bird Survey since 1966 suggest that populations of breeding kestrels have declined 47% across North America, with declines as steep as 88% in the New England region. The time to study and conserve the American Kestrel is *before* it reaches threatened or endangered status, and now you can help.

The Peregrine Fund's new American Kestrel Partnership is a research and conservation project supported by naturalists, birders, families, students, scouts, researchers, teachers, and anyone else inspired by the Western Hemisphere's only kestrel species. You can join the Partnership by creating a partner profile, building and hanging kestrel boxes, and then peering into them once every 1-3 weeks from April through July to record the numbers of eggs and nestlings. After collecting the nesting data, simply enter it on the American Kestrel Partnership's website, and voila, you just contributed both nesting habitat and data to the largest kestrel research and conservation program in history. Autumn and winter are the best times to build and hang nestboxes for kestrels to use in the



spring, so now is the time to have a box-building party with your family and friends. To participate and learn how to establish your kestrel box program, check out the American Kestrel Partnership's website:

<http://kestrel.peregrinefund.org>



American Kestrel Photos by Mia Mcpherson.

Dr. Giovanni will be presenting the American Kestrel Partnership at MK Nature Center in Boise on February 11th at 6:30 pm. This event

13th Annual Idaho Environmental Education Conference

Friday & Saturday | March 1-2, 2013 | Owyhee Plaza Hotel | Boise

Plan to attend the 13th Annual Idaho Environmental Education Conference, hosted by the Idaho Environmental Education Association, Idaho's voice for environmental literacy and education since 1982.

The conference, Idaho's premier gathering for those passionate about learning and our environment, highlights effective, affordable Idaho programs, especially those that are hands on, interdisciplinary and encourage kids to get outside and learn about their local community and environment.

The conference includes: a keynote panel, concurrent sessions, field investigations, awards luncheon, silent auction, and an exhibit fair.

Registration open now at www.idahoeec.org

Continuing Education Credits (CEUs) available for teachers.

Scholarships available for formal & non-formal educators and students.

Affordable registration fees. Always!



Idaho Environmental Education Association



The December meeting of the Pend Oreille Chapter of Idaho Master Naturalists was a Holiday Open House at the home of member Valle Novak. Pictured from left are: Clem Yonker, Phil Degens, Selma Bair, Margaret Alt, Jimmy Bolin, Gail Bolin (president), Lori Getts. Seated at R., are Valle Novak, Derek Antonelli, and Karen Lamb. During the festivities, Derek Antonelli took the opportunity to hand out sign-up sheets for upcoming 2013 service projects.

Hager Lake Vegetation Study Continued

Derek Antonelli, Idaho Master Naturalist, Pend Oreille Chapter

Hager Lake in northwestern Idaho near Priest Lake is a rare biological gem. Retreating glaciers left a five-acre kettle lake. A one-acre floating mat of *Sphagnum* moss grows on the lake. The lake is surrounded by many acres of peatland (a special kind of wetland; see the Summer 2012 issue of *Idaho Naturalist News*). Many of the plant species growing here only grow in peatland environments. The lake and the surrounding area were studied by botanists in 1952 and again in 1992. It's now 60 years after the initial study and time for a follow-up study. The Pend Oreille Chapter decided to take the Hager Lake study effort on as a citizen science project since funding was not available for a professional botanical survey crew. The purpose of this study is to repeat as closely as possible scientific vegetation studies completed in 1952 and 1992. By comparing the data gathered during this study with information from the earlier studies we will be able to identify changes taking place in this rare environment.



This is a view of Hager Lake. The floating Sphagnum moss mat is visible just beyond the old beaver lodge. The beavers made the trenches in the rose spirea thicket that surrounds Hager Lake. Photo by Lynn Kinter.

The project is an immense undertaking. Field work for the Hager Lake Vegetation Study Project has just been completed. A total of 27 different volunteers participated in the project. Many of the volunteers on the project are master naturalists from the Pend Oreille Chapter, but volunteers came from a variety of organizations—Idaho Native Plant Society, U.S. Forest Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and private individuals. Volunteers put in 64 days of fieldwork on the project. That doesn't count the many days of planning and preparation that went into the project. Teams of volunteers visited the site four separate times during the growing season—May 18-19, June 1-2, July 7-14, and September 7-8. The entire area was searched to identify as many plants as possible. In July, the team repeated transect-plot sampling from the earlier studies. Over the course of six days the team “read” 340 data frames determining extent of coverage for each species of plant in every frame.

The analysis of all the data collected during the field work is an ongoing process, but the preliminary findings are quite interesting. The team has increased the number of plant species reported for the Hager Lake area by almost 100 species. The team found 10 different species of plants that are rare to Idaho including at least two species not previously reported from the site. Look for detailed results of the Hager Lake study in upcoming issues of *Idaho Naturalist News*.



Hager Lake vegetation survey team observing plants on the floating Sphagnum moss mat. If you stand in one place too long you begin to sink into the mat. From left: Sally Jones, Jill Brewer, Karen Williams,



Left: Master Naturalists Sharon “River” Burdick and Jill Brewer are “reading” a 0.2 m² data frame to determine the cover of each species found within the data frame. Master Naturalist Derek Antonelli records their observations. Right: the trio celebrates as they finish their 340th frame. Photos by Lynn Kinter.



Podgrass or Rannoch rush (Scheuchzeria palustris) – an Idaho rare plant that is common on the floating moss mat. Photo by Marilyn George.

Hager Lake Project Photos



Jill Brewer snaps a shot of survey participants at Hager Lake. From left: Matt Davidson, Don Childress, Mary and Archie George (property owners), and Derek Antonelli. Photo by Sally Jones.



Northern starflower (Trientalis europaea ssp. arctica) – another beautiful Idaho rare plant found in the area surrounding Hager Lake. Photo by Marilyn George.



The Hager Lake vegetation survey team searches for plants in the rose spirea thicket among the Geyer and Bebb willows. From left: Derek Antonelli, Sally Jones, Sylvia Chatburn, and Karen Williams. Photo by Marilyn George.



The lanceleaf grapefern (Botrychium lanceolatum) shown here is one of the Idaho rare plants discovered by the vegetation survey team. This species was not previously reported from Hager Lake. Photo by Marilyn George.

Mountain Bluebird Trail in Eastern Idaho

Roger Piscitella, Chairman of the Upper Snake Chapter, IMNP

Bruce Laird has built approximately 130 mountain bluebird houses over the past several years. Many have been given away to friends and neighbors in the area but he maintains close to 75 houses on a blue bird trail in eastern Idaho near Spencer and Kilgore. Most of the bird houses are adjacent to public rights-of-way but are mounted on fence posts and telephone poles that are privately owned. Landowners have given him verbal approval for installing all of the birdhouses. He maintains the bird houses, monitors occupancy, relocates them as necessary when there are conflicts with other birds such as house wrens and/or tree swallows, and cleans out the old nests after the birds have migrated south in October.

Bluebirds (both mountain and western) are cavity nesters. They rely on finding cavities in dead or dying trees that woodpeckers have hollowed out (as bluebirds cannot make their own cavities). Since old forests with dead and dying trees are harder and harder to find, bluebirds are having trouble finding natural nesting places. This is where bluebird boxes come in. Nest boxes serve as artificial cavities and bluebirds love them.

The incubation period for mountain blue birds is 14 days, and they typically raise two broods per year. They continue to use the same bird house for the second brood but will not use it for the following year unless the old nests are removed at the end of the season. After raising the first brood, they build a second nest over the top of the first before raising the second family. They raise an average of four or five chicks in each brood. With two nests in a five-inch high cavity (box), there is insufficient room left to raise additional broods.

Bruce raises cattle and runs a mail route in the Spencer/Kilgore area so is able to monitor the birds' activity for at least a portion of the bird house trail while going about his normal business. Due to age, cleaning out the old nests at the end of the season is becoming a bit of a chore for him. He recognizes that there will come a time when he must turn that activity over to someone else if the bird houses are to continue in use.



In October 2012, with the help of Master Naturalists Charles and Vicki Brooks, GPS locations of each bird house were identified and tabulated into a single data sheet so that at some time in the future the bird house trail can be maintained by other Master Naturalist volunteers. The country is beautiful, but it takes about eight hours for two people to remove nests along this bluebird trail.



Volunteers might consider building their own nest boxes and adding to this or other mountain blue bird trails in the state. All of the 75 birdhouses along this bluebird trail were occupied in 2012 and a majority of the birdhouses had two nests!

Mountain Bluebird photos courtesy IDFG

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Mountain and Western Bluebird Box plans can be found at the North American Bluebird Society's website

<http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/nestboxplans.htm>

Mounting: Nail, screw or clamp the back to a wooden post, preferably with the slot opening directed away from the prevailing spring/summer winds. Cattle or horses will tend to use the birdhouse as a scratching post that could damage the birdhouse, so avoid having the box hang inside the fence line when possible. Ranchers need to maintain the fences and the birdhouses must not interfere with that function. Predation by snakes does not appear to be a problem in eastern Idaho. Birdhouses should be mounted 4 to 6 feet above the ground where possible. (Higher is okay, but makes it more challenging to clean out the nests at the end of the season.) Mounting them lower may attract mice or make them more subject to predation by cats or raccoons.

Location: Put boxes in open pasture land, approximately one-half mile away from streams or rivers and buildings. Flowing water closer than that tends to attract tree swallows and/or raccoons. Nearby buildings tend to attract sparrows and starlings as well as tree swallows. Dogs, cats, people and loud noises are unsettling to the blue birds. Boxes need to be at least .2 of a mile apart because the blue birds are territorial and need sufficient space to find food that is close to home. Overhead wires seem to be a plus because they provide a perch for the bluebirds to spot insects on the ground. Nearby dirt roads are also useful because the bluebirds dust themselves to ward off parasites. Nearby roads also facilitate monitoring and speed up the annual cleanout process. Ground elevation seems to be important; Bruce has had little success with mountain bluebird houses located below 6000 feet in this area. Placement of a box near brush or trees tends to attract house wrens. House wrens are aggressive. They will kill bluebirds and even drive off American Kestrels. House wrens also fill bluebird houses with sticks, irrespective of whether or not they intend to use the bird house for themselves.



A male western bluebird rests near his natural cavity. Idaho is home to two species of bluebirds, mountain bluebirds and western bluebirds. Western bluebirds are found in the Boise foothills and north to Canada. Photo by Sara Focht.

Natural Beauty of Keefer's Island in Idaho Falls Brought Back to Life

Alan Crockett, Upper Snake Master Naturalist

Members of the Upper Snake Chapter of the Idaho Master Naturalists and like-minded volunteers cleaned up Keefer's Island, located in the middle of the Snake River in downtown Idaho Falls.

Keefer's Island is named for old timer Fred Keefer who lived in a cabin on the island. Fred sold the island in 1961 to the city of Idaho Falls for \$1. His cabin remained on the island. At some point after Fred left the island, it was adorned with festive Christmas lights. The lights, reflected in the river, were for community celebration and enjoyment. In recent years the lights, cables and their support structures had been abandoned and forgotten.

In September 2012, volunteers with tools in hand were transported to the island by an IDFG boat. Volunteers cut cable and pipe, scooped light bulbs, carried and piled the abandoned lighting debris—pipe, lots of electrical cable, connection boxes, light bulbs, t-posts, etc.—for later removal. The crew also checked on the growth of willow and black cottonwood trees planted three years ago on the island, pruned vegetation and configured wire to protect the trees from the ever-present beavers. They cleared the brush encroaching on Fred's cabin and cleaned up inside the cabin. The Bonneville County Parks and Recreation Department provided a large pontoon boat to haul all of the collected trash to shore for recycling and disposal.

Now river walkers and views on the east and west banks of the river can see the natural beauty of Keefer's Island and the homey cabin where Fred once lived. The trash is gone.



Photos of the Keefer's Island cleanup day by Alan Crockett.



Wintering Swans in Idaho and What You Can Do (Part II)

Cathy Dufault, Henry's Fork Master Naturalist

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (RRLNWR) in Montana is home for much of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem trumpeter swan population. It has grown to more than 500 swans recently. The fall 2012 report indicates that 372 adults and 169 cygnets lived there this past summer, the largest population recorded there since 1987. Excellent nesting was also reported for nearby Idaho where six territories fledged 23 of 30 cygnets. These birds are joined each winter by about 4000 additional trumpeters from Canada to form the Rocky Mountain population of trumpeter swans.



Trumpeter Swans at Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Montana. Photo by Steve Hillebrand from NCTS Image Library.

Winter is a sociable time for trumpeter swans during which the pen (female) and cob (male) relax their vigilant watch of their new family. By their second year, young trumpeters have full adult plumage and coloring, with brown eyes, black legs and feet, and a black bill accented with a thin red streak. Two or three-year-olds begin to select their lifelong mates.

Winter habitat is critical and is a limiting factor for swan populations. In order to survive the severe winters, swans need lakes and streams with surfaces that do not freeze and which contain suitable food supplies of aquatic plants such as waterweed, pondweed, water milfoil, and duck potato. In these limited areas the trumpeters survive the fierce winters. They also feed occasionally on grain, seeds, freshwater invertebrates, snails, and worms. Few water areas in the

region supply this type of habitat and, once lost, cannot be replaced. In recent winters (which have been less severe), swans have started to use potato fields as alternate sources of food.

Flying during severe winter conditions demands huge amounts of energy for these very large birds. Old barbed wire fences and power lines may be particularly hazardous. Where such obstructions are identified, partnership programs can help in mitigating the hazard.

Trumpeter swans are extremely sensitive to many human activities and development in or near their habitats. Toxic lead in water environments from shot used by hunters and sinkers used by fishers has resulted in death for several thousand tundra and trumpeter swans during the last ten years. Human disturbance during winter forces birds out of areas. Displaced birds have great difficulty finding new homes. These aquatic habitats must be protected for swans. Diligent efforts are needed from individuals, groups, and agencies in order to ensure these great birds can survive in their habitats near where we live.



Trumpeter swan photo by Dr. Thomas G. Barnes from NCTC Image Library. Native trumpeter swans have a black beak unlike the non-native mute swan.

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What's Ahead in Idaho?

Continued efforts to:

- *Organize Idaho landowners to improve and conserve key habitat areas.
- *Gather more useful data on trumpeter swans and their habitats.
- *Increase awareness of trumpeter swans and their habitat needs.
- *Remove hazardous old barbed wire fences and mark power lines.
- *Explore strategies for long-term habitat protection.

What You Can Do

- *Buy a Federal Duck Stamp each year to support wetlands conservation. The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission provided an \$11 million grant to the National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) System which includes RRLNWR in Montana.
- *Introduce a teacher to the children's book *The Trumpet of the Swan* by E. B. White for use in classroom reading. If you know a teacher who already uses this book in the classroom, consider giving a gift of membership in The Trumpeter Swan Society (TTSS).
- *Report Trumpeter swan sightings by using the report form on www.trumpeterswansociety.org
- *If you see a banded swan, report the information to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.
- *Support conservation programs that keep lead shot and sinkers, which are toxic to swans and other water fowl, out of the environment.
- *Become aware of power lines and old barbed wire fences that may be hazardous to flying swans and discuss them with the utility company or property owner.
- *Spread the word about valuable work being done for the future of "Our Trumpeter Swans." Consider becoming a member of TTSS.

Hager Lake Cougar



Bushnell

09-07-2012 15:49:37



Bushnell

09-24-2012 09:00:07

Archie George took these photographs with a remote camera. In the left photo, you will see Master Naturalists Matt Davidson, Sally Jones and Lori Getts hiking to perform a floral survey at Hager Lake (see article on page 5). In the exact location in the right photo, notice the mountain lion! The photos were taken 17 days apart.

TVCC Chapter Restores Campus Wetland

Dorothy Tinkler, TVCC Professor and TVCC Chapter Advisor



Treasure Valley Community College held a clean-up day in November 2012 and made progress towards getting the wetlands on campus back to a functioning state. Many who worked on the project are members of the Treasure Valley Community College Chapter of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program. The area was acquired by the college in 2001 with the intent of restoring it with native plants and wildlife habitat. The restoration process and the finished wetland will be a great outdoor classroom for the natural resource students. Noxious weeds are the big problem now. Once those are removed, the students will plant native aquatic and wetland vegetation.